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African centre for migration and society: exploring help-seeking behaviours amongst migrant sex workers in Rosettenville Suburb, Johannesburg, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa, just as in most Southern African countries, sex work remains criminalised. As a result, individuals working in the sex industry - especially migrant sex workers - continue to experience many negative health outcomes. Research on sex workers' access to health care services indicate that many sex workers seldom access these services for various reasons (Richter et al,2010). This study explores the help-seeking behaviours amongst self-defined male, female and transgender migrant sex workers in Rosettenville, Johannesburg - both cross border and internal.

The study focused on the kinds of help-seeking ways migrant sex workers utilise; the factors that influence migrant sex workers help-seeking behaviours; perceived gaps in the help seeking behaviours and examined how the mobility of sex workers from one place to another (location) affect their help-seeking behaviours.

A purposive and snowball sampling technique was employed to enrol fifteen participants for the study. A qualitative research design method using in-depth individual interviews was utilised in collecting data. While data analysis was done using thematic data analysis process.

This study found that sex workers exhibit different patterns of help-seeking behaviours, predetermined by other challenges such as competing priorities between the health risks and the need to earn a living/make ends meet

This research found that the high mobility of sex workers compounds the complexities of their help-seeking behaviours. The study also found that working as a sex worker is a part of the self-identity that is constantly kept as a secret from family. This may indirectly link to a lack of help-seeking behaviours as the participants were unable to share any challenges encountered at work with any of their family members.